

Title: Shadow Part 5

Author:

"Where is he?" she wondered aloud. The crickets went silent, and Fenila heard the rustling of leaves a short distance away. "Kesdon? Are you there?" she asked. "You aren't scaring me, so just come out where I can see you." She walked around a large tree and gasped at the ground before her. A mound of bloody flesh lay at her feet. Broken bones were scattered around the pile. She recognized a leather bracelet near the mutilated body. She had given the bracelet to Kesdon on his eightieth birthday. In shock, Fenila stumbled backwards. After a couple steps, she felt a searing pain in her back. She let out a brief scream before claws ripped the girl's spine apart and shredded her heart. Her lifeless body did not hit the ground immediately. The mound of blood and flesh grew larger.

"Prey. It's what you do to little creatures. Pray. It's what little creatures do when they see you," the drider mused to herself. "You are terror incarnate. Lloth made you what you are today. If it was not for her, you'd not be in this mess. No, if it was not for Nalynn, you'd not be in this

mess. Nalynn. The bitch.
I'll see her burn for this.
I will enjoy watching her
beg for mercy. I will
welcome her cry for a
quick death. I will revel in
her terror as she
watches her friends die,
by her hand. She will rue
the day she ever came
between me and Riklaun."
Ebonstarr brooded over
the thoughts as she
re-read the scroll.

Ebonstarr curled up the
scroll and placed it in
her belt that held her
sword. She had long
abandoned her snake whip
as it had fought against
her after the
transformation. Being a
drider had its advantages,
but also its disadvantages.
Stealth being one of the
former, strength being
another. She had more
strength now than she
ever had. But she was
losing her mind, slowly
but surely. The impact of
the transformation had
set in quickly. After she
had taken her first meal,
she had felt disgusted by
it. But slowly, that too
had changed. She actually
welcomed the hunt and
slaughter of humanoids.
Eating them only seemed
proper. Her memory
seemed intact. She still
had her knowledge of
spellcasting, but her
priestess powers were
gone. All that had made
her into a priestess for
Lloth was missing. She
hated that. She hated
Nalynn for it. "Nalynn will
die... Very soon,"
Ebonstarr mused.

At the first sight of the
figure, the guards at the
gate expected the worst.

Although the approaching figure bore no obvious threat, the guards shuddered just looking at him. Reinforcements were called so the guards standing atop the gate numbered ten. As he came closer, the guards saw a heavy cloak masked the stranger. A hood hid the figure's face completely. Once in awhile, the cloak parted to reveal only cheap leather armor. No large blade hung from his belt--only small pouches. The guards' tensions dissipated. This was no warrior.

When the figure arrived at the gate, the captain of the guards called out to him. "Welcome to the gates of Neverwinter. I am Captain Dalesin of the Royal Guard. Please state your name and business in our fine city."

"My name is Aerrellun and my business is private," the figure responded. At the sound of his voice, the guards' initial fears were reawakened.

Crossbows were lifted on instinct. Dalesin waved his men to lower the weapons. Turning back to the stranger he said, "I apologize for my men's jumpiness. Your appearance seems to have unnerved them. Would you lift your hood so we might see your face?"

The figure growled but did as was asked.

Crossbows were raised once again as the pointed ears of Elves and black skin were revealed.

"Captain," Aerrellun said, "your men seem to be very jumpy indeed! I had

heard that Neverwinter is a place where persons of all races are welcome. Would this be a lie?"

After a second's hesitation, Dalesin waved the guards to lower the crossbows again. "Nay, it is not a lie. All races are welcome within our city, even drow. However, some races are watched more closely than others. Enter the city and conduct your business, Aerrellun. I trust you shall steer clear of trouble, drow."

With a signal from the captain, the gates opened smoothly on their hinges. Aerrellun replaced his hood and entered the city of Neverwinter.

Willy was looking forward to the start of this day. It was a big day for him for today would be the young halfling's first time to go berry picking without his mother. For Willy it was another step toward adulthood. He tried hard to stay calm while his mother reminded him of everything she had taught him about the woods. She had drilled them into his mind so well he could recite them on command. "Always go into the patches down wind so as be warned of any danger that might lurk within them." "Always listen to the sounds of the woods, for the woods will tell you of any unseen dangers." Willy's mother covered everything not just once or twice but thrice to make sure Willy would be safe. When she finally thought

the boy had listened she handed him his berry basket, kissed him good-bye and sent him off.

As the halfling stepped through the door, he sighed in relief. He didn't know how much longer he could have controlled his desire to be off on his hunt. When he came to the first berry patch, he remembered all his mother had told him and did as she instructed. Willy approached from downwind and listened to the sounds of the woods.

When he was satisfied all was well he approached the patch and started picking the elderberries with care. He went from one patch to the next, but his imagination began to wander, for no longer was he picking berries but instead hunting the treasures of lost kingdoms.

Willy finally came upon the last berry patch and grinned in excitement. He was in a hurry to get through the thicket that surrounded the berry patch and claim his treasure. As the boy moved through the thicket he wasn't thinking of the rules of approaching from downwind or of listening to the sounds of the woods. He was thinking of treasure and the proud look his mother would have when he showed her his fine basket of treasure. Willy stepped out of the thicket into the berry patch and stopped dead in his tracks. Something was wrong. He looked around to see what was making him feel this way. The

halfling caught a movement from the corner of his eyes, but when he looked carefully he saw nothing. Willy told his body to flee but it wouldn't. Willy's mind screamed at his body to run, to run like the wind, but his body just stood there motionless. Willy frantically searched for the source of his fear. When it came into view terror ripped through his mind.